

and the local Red Cross worked around the clock to ease the suffering of those forced from their homes.

Recognizing our State's emergency situation, on June 18, 1998, President Clinton declared the State of Florida a major disaster area, paving the way for over \$32 million in Federal aid to reach Florida's fire-ravaged areas.

More recently, Secretary Glickman declared Florida eligible for Department of Agriculture assistance. That was very good news for Florida's family farmers, who sustained significant production losses. Agricultural interests in Florida suffered \$100 million in damages just from El Nino events, and then lost more than \$400 million in the following droughts and fires.

As grateful as we are in Florida for this Federal assistance, it comes at a 25 percent State cost. FEMA has initiated \$60 million worth of missions to help Florida, but that means that Florida must contribute \$15 million of its own. Add that to about \$45 million in State and local costs, and the State's price tag of this natural disaster really begins to mount.

Fortunately, FEMA policy allows 100 percent Federal funding for direct Federal assistance emergency work. Recently Florida requested that the President authorize 100 percent funding for essential Federal assistance provided to date and thereafter.

I hope that the 100 percent assistance will be granted, as this is the fifth disaster declaration Florida has faced in 5 years, and that it comes on the heels of the El Nino floods earlier this year. Florida disaster resources are nearly exhausted. By reflecting on our response to this natural disaster, we can prepare for future fire outbreaks.

As a member of the House Fire Service Caucus, I recognize that a coordinated effort of all available resources is necessary to battle these blazes. On June 25, I joined fellow caucus members at a press conference highlighting our new task force and initiative on wildland fires.

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We contacted the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Cohen, requesting the cooperation and the assistance of the Department of Defense to identify assets he could make available for firefighting purposes. Additionally, we asked the U.S. National Guard to examine its past deployments in firefighting efforts and then offer recommendations as to how these assets can be most effectively administered.

Luckily, I say to my colleagues, recent rains have provided some relief, and those who helped us through the worst deserve our praise and thanks. As we have seen, this difficult situation revealed our country's good character. This was evident in the valiant firefighting efforts that began on the first of June. I am confident that through a continued coordinated effort we will completely extinguish these fires threatening Florida and begin the long process of recovery.

Madam Speaker, I am here today to applaud all the efforts of all Floridians for all the hard work they have done to put out these fires. God bless them all.

TRIBUTE TO WATKINS M. ABBITT, SR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SISISKY) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SISISKY. Madam Speaker, it is my sad duty to inform the House that former Congressman Watkins M. Abbitt, who formerly represented the 4th District of Virginia, died yesterday at the age of 90.

Congressman Abbitt was a true son of the south. He was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, 1908, graduated from the Appomattox Agricultural High School in 1925, and earned a law degree from the University of Richmond in 1931. He served as Commonwealth's Attorney in Appomattox from 1932 to 1948 and was a member of Virginia's Constitutional Convention in 1945.

He was a delegate to Democratic State conventions from 1932 to 1952, Chairman of the Democratic Central Committee from 1964 to 1970, and delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1964. He also became a director of the Farmers National Bank.

He was elected to Congress in 1948 and served until he retired in 1973.

I will be the first to tell my colleagues that the 4th District has changed since Wat Abbitt served in Congress, and the great thing about Wat Abbitt was that he saw changes coming and was ready to change with it. Nevertheless, the rural character of Southside is still there; the peanut and tobacco farmers and families are still there.

After he retired, Wat Abbitt said his biggest accomplishment had been looking after the interests of the farmers in his district. I hope they can say that about me.

Among many of my constituents, Wat Abbitt is still the standard by which they measure an effective Congressman. I can tell my colleagues this about serving in Congress: I have worked hard to get the job, and I think I would have been elected even if Wat Abbitt had not helped me, but it sure made things easier for me that he did. I suspect there is 40 years worth of Virginia's governors, from both parties, and Congressmen who could say the same thing. He was one of the rare politicians who combined fidelity to the past with respect for the future. That ability helped change Virginia from the way it used to be to the way that it is today.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODE).

Mr. GOODE. Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to join my colleague, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SISISKY) in expressing sadness at the passing of

former Congressman Watkins M. Abbitt of Appomattox. He served with distinction in this body for over 24 years. He represented the 4th District, but from 1972 on, he was a resident of Virginia's 5th District.

He first came to Congress in the winter of 1948 when he won an overwhelming victory over four opponents. In the years that followed, he rarely faced opposition because of his outstanding reputation and his leadership in the United States House of Representatives.

As Chairman of the Democratic Party of Virginia, he fought hard to bring our party into a position of prominence. In 1946, he had the distinction of being the only Statewide campaign manager for two Statewide campaigns, those of U.S. Senator Harry Byrd and U.S. Senator A. Willis Robinson. Both were overwhelmingly successful.

In 1972, Wat Abbitt retired from Congress though not from politics or life. He left all of us who knew him with many legacies, but I should mention three of the hallmarks of his legislative years: support for tobacco, fighting for peanuts, and warnings about rising deficits. In his later years he remained active. This last year he sold more tickets to the Appomattox County Democratic Fish Fry than any other person.

He gained renown as a great speaker, and I fondly recall his remarks and his speeches on my behalf in the nomination process for the U.S. House of Representatives.

I join many others in extending condolences to his wife; to his son, Watkins M. Abbitt, Jr., who is following in his father's footsteps and who is a member of the Virginia House of Delegates; to his two daughters; to his two brothers; and to his sisters. May we all remember his enthusiasm, his zest for living, and his willingness to fight for causes that were just and may he always serve as a model for us in the years ahead.

JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR FILIPINO VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized during morning hour debate for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, what I want to do this afternoon is to bring to the attention of my colleagues and the American people a glaring injustice that has existed in this country for more than half a century, an injustice that was caused in 1946 and that we in this Congress in 1998 have a chance to remedy.

Recently, this Congress passed a resolution of support and congratulations for the 100th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of the Philippines. We celebrated that anniversary as true partners in the world with the Philippine Republic. I said at that